

Application No. 09/998,557
Amendment dated February 28, 2005
Reply to Final Office Action of December 28, 2004

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Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings of claims in the application.

Listing of Claims:

1. (Currently Amended) A method for using a voice-messaging system to place long-distance telephone calls, comprising:

establishing a user account for a user, wherein the user account has associated with it pre-determined rates for placing telephone calls using the voice messaging system;

at a voice-messaging system, receiving a toll-free call placed by a the user;
verifying that the user is a valid user of the voice-messaging system;
receiving from the user a request to place a long-distance telephone call;
receiving from the user a telephone number of a third-party telephone line to be called;

establishing a direct connection between the user and the third-party telephone line;

disconnecting the voice-messaging system from the call; and
charging a pre-established user account of the user a pre-determined long-distance rate in relation to the telephone call.

2. (Original) The method as recited in claim 1, further comprising the step of connecting the telephone call to the third-party telephone line if the third-party telephone line is available.

3. (Cancelled)

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4. (Original) The method as recited in claim 1, wherein the step of verifying that the user is a valid user comprises receiving and verifying a user-identification code and a password code.

5. (Cancelled)

6. (Previously Presented) The method as recited in claim 4, wherein the user-identification code is associated with a billing account, and wherein charges for the long-distance call are charged to the billing account.

7. (Original) The method as recited in claim 1, wherein the voice-messaging system allows the user to choose between accessing voice messages or placing a telephone call.

8. (Original) The method as recited in claim 1, wherein the voice-messaging system directs the user back to a voice-messaging-system menu if a third-party-call connection is not established.

9. (Original) The method as recited in claim 1, wherein the voice-messaging system directs the user back to a voice-messaging-system menu when the user enters a pre-defined signal at any step during the process of placing a call to a third party.

10-12. (Cancelled)

13. (Currently Amended) An article of manufacture, comprising:

a computer-usable medium having a computer-readable program-code means embodied therein for causing a voice-messaging system to place long-distance telephone calls, the computer-readable program-code means in said article of manufacture comprising;

computer-readable program means for causing a computer to receive a toll-free call placed by a user, wherein the user has a user account and wherein the user account has associated with it pre-determined rates for placing telephone calls using the voice messaging system;

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computer-readable program means for causing a computer to verify that the user is a valid user of the voice-messaging system;

computer-readable program means for causing a computer to receive from the user a request to place a long-distance telephone call;

computer-readable program means for causing a computer to receive from the user a telephone number of a third-party telephone line to be called;

computer-readable program means for causing a computer to establish a direct connection between the user and the third-party telephone line;

computer-readable program means for causing a computer to disconnect the voice messaging system from the call; and

computer-readable program means for causing a computer to charge a pre-established user account of the user a pre-determined long-distance rate in relation to the telephone call.

14. (Original) The article of manufacture as recited in claim 13, further comprising computer-readable program means for causing a computer to be connected to the third-party telephone line via the telephone call if the third-party telephone line is available.

15. (Original) The article of manufacture as recited in claim 13, wherein the computer-readable program means for causing a computer to verify that the user is a valid user comprises computer-readable program means for causing a computer to receive and verify a user-identification code and a password code.

16. (Cancelled)

17. (Previously Presented) The article of manufacture as recited in claim 15, wherein the user-identification code is associated with a billing account, and wherein charges for the long-distance call are charged to the billing account.

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18. (Original) The article of manufacture as recited in claim 13, further comprising computer-readable program means for causing a computer to provide the user a choice between accessing voice messages or placing a telephone call.

19. (Original) The article of manufacture as recited in claim 13, further comprising computer-readable program means for causing a computer to direct the user back to a voice-messaging-system menu if a third-party call connection is not established.

20. (Original) The article of manufacture as recited in claim 13, further comprising computer-readable program means for causing a computer to direct the user back to a voice-messaging-system menu when the user enters a pre-defined signal at any step during the process of placing a call to a third party.

21-23. (Cancelled)

24. (Previously Presented) A method of using a voice messaging system to place a telephone call, comprising:

- establishing a user account for a user, wherein the user account has associated with it pre-determined rates for placing telephone calls using the voice messaging system;

- issuing the user an user-identification code and a password code associated with the user account;

- providing the user a toll-free number by which to access the voice messaging system;

- receiving a call from the user via the toll-free number;

- verifying that the user is a valid user by receiving and verifying the user-identification code and password code associated with the user account;

- receiving a request from the user to place a telephone call;

- receiving from the user the telephone number to call;

- placing the call to the telephone number; and

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charging the user account of the user the pre-determined rates if the call is connected.

25. (Currently Amended) A method for using a voice-messaging system to place long-distance telephone calls, comprising

establishing a user account for a user, wherein the user account has associated with it pre-determined rates for placing telephone calls using the voice messaging system;

at a voice-messaging system, receiving a toll-free call placed by a the user;

verifying that the user is a valid user of the voice-messaging system;

receiving from the user a request to place a long-distance telephone call;

receiving from the user a telephone number of a third-party telephone line to be called;

establishing a 3-way call between the user, the voice-messaging system and the third-party telephone line; and

charging a pre-established user account of the user a pre-determined long-distance rate in relation to the telephone call.

26. (Previously Presented) The method as recited in claim 25, further comprising the step of connecting the telephone call to the third-party telephone line if the third-party telephone line is available.

27. (Previously Presented) The method as recited in claim 25, wherein the step of verifying that the user is a valid user comprises receiving and verifying a user-identification code and a password code.

28. (Previously Presented) The method as recited in claim 27, wherein the user-identification code is associated with a billing account, and wherein charges for the long-distance call are charged to the billing account.

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29. (Previously Presented) The method as recited in claim 25, wherein the voice-messaging system allows the user to choose between accessing voice messages or placing a telephone call.

30. (Previously Presented) The method as recited in claim 25, wherein the voice-messaging system directs the user back to a voice-messaging-system menu if a third-party-call connection is not established.

31. (Previously Presented) The method as recited in claim 25, wherein the voice-messaging system directs the user back to a voice-messaging-system menu when the user enters a pre-defined signal at any step during the process of placing a call to a third party.

32. (Currently Amended) An article of manufacture, comprising:

a computer-usable medium having a computer-readable program-code means embodied therein for causing a voice-messaging system to place long-distance telephone calls, the computer-readable program-code means in said article of manufacture comprising;

computer-readable program means for causing a computer to receive a toll-free call placed by a user, wherein the user has a user account and wherein the user account has associated with it pre-determined rates for placing telephone calls using the voice messaging system;

computer-readable program means for causing a computer to verify that the user is a valid user of the voice-messaging system;

computer-readable program means for causing a computer to receive from the user a request to place a long-distance telephone call;

computer-readable program means for causing a computer to receive from the user a telephone number of a third-party telephone line to be called;

computer-readable program means for causing a computer to establish a three-way call between the user, the voice-messaging system and the third-party telephone line; and

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computer-readable program means for causing a computer to charge a pre-established user account of the user a pre-determined long-distance rate in relation to the telephone call.

33. (Previously Presented) The article of manufacture as recited in claim 32, further comprising computer-readable program means for causing a computer to be connected to the third-party telephone line via the telephone call if the third-party telephone line is available.

34. (Previously Presented) The article of manufacture as recited in claim 32, wherein the computer-readable program means for causing a computer to verify that the user is a valid user comprises computer-readable program means for causing a computer to receive and verify a user-identification code and a password code.

35. (Previously Presented) The article of manufacture as recited in claim 34, wherein the user-identification code is associated with a billing account, and wherein charges for the long-distance call are charged to the billing account.

36. (Previously Presented) The article of manufacture as recited in claim 32, further comprising computer-readable program means for causing a computer to provide the user a choice between accessing voice messages or placing a telephone call.

37. (Previously Presented) The article of manufacture as recited in claim 32, further comprising computer-readable program means for causing a computer to direct the user back to a voice-messaging-system menu if a third-party call connection is not established.

38. (Previously Presented) The article of manufacture as recited in claim 32, further comprising computer-readable program means for causing a computer to direct the user back to a voice-messaging-system menu when the user enters a pre-defined signal at any step during the process of placing a call to a third party.

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39. (Currently Amended) A method for using a voice-messaging system to place long-distance telephone calls, comprising

establishing a user account for a user, wherein the user account has associated with it pre-determined rates for placing telephone calls using the voice messaging system;

at a voice-messaging system, receiving a toll-free call placed by a the user;

verifying that the user is a valid user of the voice-messaging system;

receiving from the user a request to place a long-distance telephone call;

receiving from the user a telephone number of a third-party telephone line to be called;

placing a telephone call to the third-party telephone line associated with the third-party telephone number entered by the user;

during or after the call between the user and the third party, receiving a pre-defined signal from the user;

transferring the user back to a voice-messaging-system menu; and

charging a pre-established user account of the user a pre-determined long-distance rate in relation to the telephone call.

40. (Previously Presented) The method as recited in claim 39, further comprising the step of connecting the telephone call to the third-party telephone line if the third-party telephone line is available.

41. (Previously Presented) The method as recited in claim 39, wherein the step of verifying that the user is a valid user comprises receiving and verifying a user-identification code and a password code.

42. (Previously Presented) The method as recited in claim 41, wherein the user-identification code is associated with a billing account, and wherein charges for the long-distance call are charged to the billing account.

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43. (Previously Presented) The method as recited in claim 39, wherein the voice-messaging system allows the user to choose between accessing voice messages or placing a telephone call.

44. (Previously Presented) The method as recited in claim 39, wherein the voice-messaging system directs the user back to a voice-messaging-system menu if a third-party-call connection is not established.

45. (Previously Presented) The method as recited in claim 39, wherein the voice-messaging system directs the user back to a voice-messaging-system menu when the user enters a pre-defined signal at any step during the process of placing a call to a third party.

46. (Currently Amended) An article of manufacture, comprising:

a computer-usable medium having a computer-readable program-code means embodied therein for causing a voice-messaging system to place long-distance telephone calls, the computer-readable program-code means in said article of manufacture comprising;

computer-readable program means for causing a computer to receive a toll-free call placed by a user, wherein the user has a user account and wherein the user account has associated with it pre-determined rates for placing telephone calls using the voice messaging system;

computer-readable program means for causing a computer to verify that the user is a valid user of the voice-messaging system;

computer-readable program means for causing a computer to receive from the user a request to place a long-distance telephone call;

computer-readable program means for causing a computer to receive from the user a telephone number of a third-party telephone line to be called;

computer-readable program means for causing a computer to place a telephone call to the third-party telephone line associated with the third-party telephone number entered by the user;

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computer-readable program means for causing a computer to receive a pre-defined signal from the user during or after the call between the user and the third party;

computer-readable program means for causing a computer to transfer the user back to a voice-messaging-system menu; and

computer-readable program means for causing a computer to charge a pre-established user account of the user a pre-determined long-distance rate in relation to the telephone call.

47. (Previously Presented) The article of manufacture as recited in claim 46, further comprising computer-readable program means for causing a computer to be connected to the third-party telephone line via the telephone call if the third-party telephone line is available.

48. (Previously Presented) The article of manufacture as recited in claim 46, wherein the computer-readable program means for causing a computer to verify that the user is a valid user comprises computer-readable program means for causing a computer to receive and verify a user-identification code and a password code.

49. (Previously Presented) The article of manufacture as recited in claim 48, wherein the user-identification code is associated with a billing account, and wherein charges for the long-distance call are charged to the billing account.

50. (Previously Presented) The article of manufacture as recited in claim 46, further comprising computer-readable program means for causing a computer to provide the user a choice between accessing voice messages or placing a telephone call.

51. (Previously Presented) The article of manufacture as recited in claim 46, further comprising computer-readable program means for causing a computer to direct the user back to a voice-messaging-system menu if a third-party call connection is not established.

52. (Previously Presented) The article of manufacture as recited in claim 46, further comprising computer-readable program means for causing a computer to direct the user

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back to a voice-messaging-system menu when the user enters a pre-defined signal at any step during the process of placing a call to a third party.